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Reveal New Arms Budget, Carter Urged

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The pressure on President Carter to commit himself to more defense spending to win Senate ratification of the SALT II treaty is increasing.

Three senators, including the pivotal Sam Nunn, D-Ga., yesterday made public a letter they wrote to Carter designed to put him on record in detail about his Pentagon spending plans.

"As you know, there is now substantial testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee that the SALT II treaty should not be ratified, and indeed is not in the national interest, in the absence of sustained and significant real increases in U.S. defense spending and capabilities over the coming years," wrote Nunn and Sens. Henry M. Jackson, D-Wash., and John Tower, R-Tex., all of whom are members of the committee.

The letter was released on the eve of a congressional recess that the administration hopes to use to catch up with the recent shift in the focus of the Senate debate over SALT.

The administration has taken heart that the debate has for the time being shifted away from the contents of the treaty. But officials in government who are dealing with the issue so far haven't formulated a response to what has replaced the treaty at center stage in the debate, the question of the adequacy of present and planned defense programs.

Nunn is considered crucial to the administration's chances of putting together the needed two-thirds majority to win ratification. He has said the treaty would be acceptable if accompanied by a substantial increase in carefully allocated defense spending.

Jackson and Tower, however, are opposed to the treaty as it now stands.

"Like the Joint Chiefs (of Staff) and others who have testified, we believe that real increases of at least 4-5 percent in the over-all budget are essential if the U.S. is to begin reversing the unfavorable trends in the military balance," read the letter to Carter.

Nunn initiated the letter and said yesterday afternoon that it was only the beginning of the information he would need to make a decision on the treaty.

The questions contained in the letter dealt with the whole range of budgetary concerns, from nuclear weapons to the all-volunteer force to the manner in which the administration intended to compensate for inflation.

"We request that you make clear in the coming weeks your intentions with regard to the administration's planned budget for the national defense over the next five years," the letter

Some of the weightiest testimony on the need to increase defense spending before SALT II could be ratified came from former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Kissinger repeated the call he made earlier for the Senate to defer action on SALT II until Carter acts to improve defenses, and he also clarified some earlier testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Kissinger said he probably would have recommended that SALT II be signed and submitted to the Senate as Carter has done, but he also said he would have insisted on a strengthened military program along with it, plus clarifications in the treaty provisions.

Administration SALT II strategists and a number of press accounts marked this as a boost for the treaty, for which Kissinger's own negotiations had laid much of the groundwork.

But Kissinger told the armed services panel yesterday that he was neither boosting nor attacking the treaty, but rather was reaffirming his earlier testimony that he would support ratification only if his conditions were met.

"I do not want to create the impression that I've changed my mind in 48 hours," he said.

At the same committee meeting, Sen. Gary Hart, D-Colo., said the shift in the SALT debate from the treaty to overall defense posture marked a historic shift after polarization and bitterness over Vietnam.

"A new consensus is beginning to emerge, a consensus which links limits on strategic arms with overall modernization of our forces," said Hart.

"SALT II represents both a part of our defense mosaic and the opportunity to redesign and improve it," said Hart, who in 1972 was manager of Sen. George McGovern's unsuccessful bid for the presidency. McGovern, D-S.D., is skeptical of SALT II because, in his view, it requires more arms construction than reduction.

Another Senate liberal, John Culver, D-Iowa, warned that unbridled defense spending could eventually cost considerably more than the dollars appropriated.

Culver asked those who want more defense programs to tell him "what program do they offer to offset those increases in order to maintain the health of our economy? More taxes; greater deficits; greater inflation?"

In a related development yesterday, the administration picked up two key endorsements on the issue of verification, which is the shorthand term for the ability of the United States to monitor Soviet strategic activities well enough to determine whether they are complying with the arms pact.

In a letter to Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, chairman of the foreign relations panel, CIA Director Stansfield Turner said most SALT provisions could be verified "well enough."

"For the few provisions that we cannot monitor with this degree of confidence, I believe the Soviet perception of risks versus gains will make such cheating an unattractive option for them," Turner wrote.